2319

WORLD CONFERENCE ON FAITH AND ORDER

QUESTIONS FOR STUDY

ON

THE NATURE OF THE CHURCH
THE CHURCH'S MINISTRY
THE SACRAMENTS

BASED ON REPORTS III, V, VI OF THE LAUSANNE CONFERENCE OF 1927

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The Continuation Committee at Prague in 1928 entrusted to the Committee of Reference the preparation of study material, based on the Lausanne Reports, for the use of local discussion groups. The following Questions for Study were drafted by the Committee of Reference, were submitted to the Continuation Committee at Maloja, Switzerland, in 1929, were revised at a joint session of the Committee of Reference with members of the Business Committee present at Maloja, and are now circulated by desire of the Continuation Committee.

FOREWORD.

The Faith and Order Movement is a concerted attempt to promote the cause of Christian unity by means of conference. It starts from two convictions, (1) that the desire for unity needs to be quickened by the recognition and reaffirmation of those beliefs which Christians already possess in common; (2) that the paths to unity cannot be found unless members of the severed Christian communions come together in order to understand each other, and to examine anew those differences of principle and practice which now divide them. It has therefore invited the Christian world to *consider* the things in which we agree and those in which we differ.

At Lausanne in 1927 we set out upon this path of mutual understanding, and made some advance along it. The next step must be taken, not by five hundred people in a conference, but by the rank and file of the Churches. It is time that they began to *consider*, with the desire to *understand*. Experience proves that real reunion does not come within the horizon of possibility until the rank and file desire it, *knowing why*.

The Lausanne Conference confronted seven great subjects, and issued seven Reports which embody the main agreements and disagreements of its members upon them. Three of these Reports, III, V and VI, are reprinted here. They

deal with three subjects upon which there is great divergence of opinion and an urgent need for further consideration — the Nature of the Church, the Christian Ministry, and the Christian Sacraments.

To each Report a series of questions is prefixed. The best use to which they can be put is to form a small group composed, if possible, of members of different Churches, which should meet at regular intervals for genuine conference. The group should read each report as a whole (the leader would do well to study also the Lausanne discussions which led up to it), and should then consider the questions suggested. It should also ask its members whether the questions are really those which need to be asked; for it is certain that in different parts of Christendom the actual difficulties will be regarded from different angles; and we should wish our groups only to occupy themselves with what they really feel to be important. This discussion-material has indeed been framed for general use; but it is intended only to suggest, not to limit or dictate, the course which study should follow.

Criticisms of the questions, suggestions of further topics, and reports of group-discussions will be welcomed by the Committee, and should be addressed to the Secretariat, P.O. Box 226, Boston, Mass., U.S.A.

Publications about the World Conference on Faith and Order may be had without charge from the Secretariat, P.O. Box 226, Boston, Mass., U.S.A. Please send the names and addresses of any persons who might be interested in the movement.

QUESTIONS ON
THE NATURE OF THE CHURCH.

(Report III, pp. 5–7)

In studying this Report it should be remembered that it presupposes Reports I and II: see p. 6, line 19, 'we are convinced that it is the will of Christ that the one life of the one body should be manifest to the world. To commend the Gospel to doubting, sinful and bewildered men, a united witness is necessary.'

The Report (*a*) lays down affirmatively certain principles as to the origin, character, purpose and oneness of the Church, and then (*b*) records the existence of differences which need further examination. The following questions are suggested under these two heads.

(*a*) 1. Did Jesus Christ found (or re-found) one visible Church to be the organ of His action in the world?

2. If 'there is and can be but one Church', what are we to understand by the expression 'the Churches'?

3. Should we agree that the six characteristics enumerated as the marks whereby the Church can be known of men are all essential?

4. What is the relation of the Church to the Bible?

(*b*) 1. What is to be understood by the expression 'the invisible Church'?

2. What are the essentials of Church membership?

3. Has the Church, or any part of it, the right to remodel the forms of its organisation?

4. Is the evidence of the New Testament the sole standard by which Church order ought to be judged?

received by the full Conference, *nem. con.*,
Lausanne, August 19, 1927.

THE NATURE OF THE CHURCH.

God who has given us the Gospel for the salvation of the world has appointed His Church to witness by life and word to its redeeming power. The Church of the Living God is constituted by His own will, not by the will or consent or beliefs of men whether as individuals or as societies, though He uses the will of men as His instrument. Of this Church Jesus Christ is the Head, the Holy Spirit its continuing life.

The Church as the communion of believers in Christ Jesus is, according to the New Testament, the people of the New Covenant; the Body of Christ; and the Temple of God, built upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone.

The Church is God's chosen instrument by which Christ, through the Holy Spirit, reconciles men to God through faith, bringing their wills into subjection to His sovereignty, sanctifying them through the means of grace, and uniting them in love and service to be His witnesses and fellow-workers in the extension of His rule on earth until His Kingdom come in glory.

As there is but one Christ, and one life in Him, and one Holy Spirit who guides into all truth, so there is and can be but one Church, holy, catholic, and apostolic.

The Church on earth possesses certain characteristics whereby it can be known of men. These have been, since the days of the Apostles, at least the following:

1. The possession and acknowledgment of the Word of God as given in Holy Scripture and interpreted by the Holy Spirit to the Church and to the individual. (a)

2. The profession of faith in God as He is incarnate and revealed in Christ.

3. The acceptance of Christ's commission to preach the Gospel to every creature.

4. The observance of the Sacraments.

5. A ministry for the pastoral office, the preaching of the Word, and the administration of the Sacraments.

6. A fellowship in prayer, in worship, in all the means of grace, in the pursuit of holiness, and in the service of man.

As to the extent and manner in which the Church thus described finds expression in the existing Churches, we differ. Our differences chiefly concern:

1. The nature of the Church visible and the Church invisible, their relation to each other, and the number of those who are included in each. (b)

2. The significance of our divisions past and present. (c)

Whatever our views on these points, we are convinced that it is the will of Christ that the one life of the one body should be manifest to the world. To commend the Gospel to doubting, sinful and bewildered men, a united witness is necessary. We therefore urge most earnestly that all Christians in fulfilment of our Saviour's prayer that His disciples may be one reconsecrate themselves to God, that by the help of His Spirit the body of Christ may be built up, its members united in faith and love, and existing obstacles to the manifestation of their unity in Christ may be removed; that the world may believe that the Father has sent Him.

We join in the prayer that the time may be hastened when in the name of Jesus every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

NOTES.

(*a*) Some hold that this interpretation is given through the tradition of the Church; others through the immediate witness of the Spirit to the heart and conscience of believers; others through both combined.

(*b*) For instance

1. Some hold that the invisible Church is wholly in heaven; others include in it all true believers on earth, whether contained in any organisation or not.

2. Some hold that the visible expression of the Church was determined by Christ Himself and is therefore unchangeable; others that the one Church under the guidance of the Holy Spirit may express itself in varying forms.

3. Some hold that one or other of the existing Churches is the only true Church; others that the Church as we have described it is to be found in some or all of the existing communions taken together.

4. Some, while recognising other Christian bodies as Churches, are persuaded that in the providence of God and by the teaching of history a particular form of ministry has been shown to be necessary to the best welfare of the Church; others hold that no one form of organisation is inherently preferable; still others, that no organisation is necessary.

(*c*) One view is that no division of Christendom has ever come to pass without sin. Another view is that the divisions were the inevitable outcome of different gifts of the Spirit and different understandings of the truth. Between these, there is the view of those who look back on the divisions of the past with penitence and sorrow coupled with a lively sense of God's mercy, which in spite of and even through these divisions has advanced His cause in the world.

QUESTIONS ON THE MINISTRY OF THE CHURCH.

(Report V, pp. 9–13)

The Report makes five statements upon which the Lausanne Conference was in "substantial accord." The truth and importance of these statements should be carefully examined.

The divisions of Christendom depend very largely upon differences of thought and practice with regard to the Ministry; actual projects and hopes of reunion therefore require further mutual understanding on this point.

(1) The present non-existence of "a ministry acknowledged in every part of the Church as having the authority of the whole Church" is a patent fact. In what ways is this fact a persistent cause of Christian disunion?

(2) "Catholic" tradition attaches great importance to the fact and idea of *continuity* in relation to the Ministry. What is the real meaning and importance of this?

(3) Many Christians regard ordination as the corporate recognition by the Church of the grace already given to those who are called to the Ministry. What is the ground of this view, and can it be reconciled with the belief that in ordination, in answer to prayer, the grace of the ministry is given?

(4) How would you work out the suggestion that there are elements of episcopal, presbyterian and congregational order, all of which ought to have their place in the life of a reunited Church?

(5) What place is there for priesthood in the ministry of the Church?

received by the full Conference, *nem. con.*,
Lausanne, August 20, 1927.

THE MINISTRY OF THE CHURCH.

We members of the Conference on Faith and Order are happy to report that we find ourselves in substantial accord in the following five propositions:

1. The ministry is a gift of God through Christ to His Church and is essential to the being and well-being of the Church.

2. The ministry is perpetually authorised and made effective through Christ and His Spirit.

3. The purpose of the ministry is to impart to men the saving and sanctifying benefits of Christ through pastoral service, the preaching of the Gospel, and the administration of the sacraments, to be made effective by faith.

4. The ministry is entrusted with the government and discipline of the Church, in whole or in part.

5. Men gifted for the work of the ministry, called by the Spirit and accepted by the Church are commissioned through an act of ordination by prayer and the laying on of hands to exercise the function of this ministry.

Within the many Christian communions into which in the course of history Christendom has been divided, various forms of ministry have grown up according to the circumstances of the several communions and their beliefs as to the mind of Christ and the guidance of the New Testament. These communions have been, in God's providence, manifestly and abundantly used by the Holy Spirit in His work of enlightening the world, converting sinners, and perfecting

saints. But the differences which have arisen in regard to the authority and functions of these various forms of ministry have been and are the occasion of manifold doubts, questions and misunderstandings.

These differences concern the nature of the ministry (whether consisting of one or several orders), the nature of ordination and of the grace conferred thereby, the function and authority of Bishops, and the nature of Apostolic succession. We believe that the first step toward the overcoming of these difficulties is the frank recognition that they exist, and the clear definition of their nature. We therefore add as an appendix to our Report such a statement, commending it to the thoughtful consideration of the Churches we represent.

By these differences the difficulties of inter-communion have been accentuated to the distress and wounding of faithful souls, while in the mission field, where the Church is fulfilling its primary object to preach the Gospel to every creature, the young Churches find the lack of unity a very serious obstacle to the furtherance of the Gospel. Consequently the provision of a ministry acknowledged in every part of the Church as possessing the sanction of the whole Church is an urgent need.

There has not been time in this Conference to consider all the points of difference between us in the matter of the ministry with that care and patience which could alone lead to complete agreement. The same observation applies equally to proposals for the constitution of the united Church. Certain suggestions as to possible church organisation have been made, which we transmit to the Churches with the earnest hope that common study of these questions will be continued by the members of the various Churches represented in this Conference.

In view of (1) the place which the Episcopate, the Councils of Presbyters, and the Congregation of the faithful, re-

spectively, had in the constitution of the early Church, and (2) the fact that episcopal, presbyteral and congregational systems of government are each today, and have been for centuries, accepted by great communions in Christendom, and (3) the fact that episcopal, presbyteral and congregational systems are each believed by many to be essential to the good order of the Church, we therefore recognise that these several elements must all, under conditions which require further study, have an appropriate place in the order of life of a reunited Church, and that each separate communion, recalling the abundant blessing of God vouchsafed to its ministry in the past, should gladly bring to the common life of the united Church its own spiritual treasures.

If the foregoing suggestion be accepted and acted upon, it is essential that the acceptance of any special form of ordination as the regular and orderly method of introduction into the ministry of the Church for the future should not be interpreted to imply the acceptance of any one particular theory of the origin, character or function of any office in the Church, or to involve the acceptance of any adverse judgment on the validity of ordination in those branches of the Church universal that believe themselves to have retained valid and apostolic orders under other forms of ordination; or as disowning or discrediting a past or present ministry of the Word and Sacrament which has been used and blessed by the Spirit of God.

It is further recognised that inasmuch as the Holy Spirit is bestowed upon every believer, and each believer has an immediate access to God through Jesus Christ, and since special gifts of the Holy Spirit, such as teaching, preaching, and spiritual counsel, are the treasures of the Church as well as of the individual, it is necessary and proper that the Church should make fuller use of such gifts for the development of its corporate spiritual life and for the extension of the Kingdom of Jesus Christ, our Lord.

In particular, we share in the conviction, repeatedly expressed in this Conference, that pending the solution of the

questions of faith and order in which agreements have not yet been reached, it is possible for us, not simply as individuals but as Churches, to unite in the activities of brotherly service which Christ has committed to His disciples. We therefore commend to our Churches the consideration of the steps which may be immediately practicable to bring our existing unity in service to more effective expression.

In conclusion, we express our thankfulness to Almighty God for the great progress which has been made in recent years in the mutual approach of the Churches to one another, and our conviction that we must go forward with faith and courage, confident that with the blessing of God we shall be able to solve the problems that lie before us.

NOTES.

1. The following is the view of the Orthodox Church, as formulated for us by its representatives.

> "The Orthodox Church, regarding the ministry as instituted in the Church by Christ Himself, and as the body which by a special charisma is the organ through which the Church spreads its means of grace such as the sacraments, and believing that the ministry in its threefold form of Bishops, Presbyters and Deacons can only be based on the unbroken apostolic succession, regrets that it is unable to come in regard to the ministry into some measure of agreement with many of the Churches represented at this Conference; but prays God that He, through His Holy Spirit, will guide to union even in regard to this difficult point of disagreement."

2. In Western Christendom also there are conspicuous differences.

> One representative view includes the following points: (a) that there have always been various grades of the

ministry, each with its own function; (b) that ordination is a sacramental act of divine institution, and therefore indispensable, conveying the special charisma for the particular ministry; (c) that Bishops who have received their office by succession from the Apostles are the necessary ministers of ordination; (d) that the apostolic succession so understood is necessary for the authority of the ministry, the visible unity of the Church, and the validity of the sacraments.

On the other hand it is held by many Churches represented in the Conference (a) that essentially there is only one ministry, that of the Word and Sacraments; (b) that the existing ministries in these Churches are agreeable to the New Testament, are proved by their fruits and have due authority in the Church, and the sacraments ministered by them are valid; (c) that no particular form of ministry is necessary to be received as a matter of faith; (d) that the grace which fits men for the ministry is immediately given by God, and is recognised, not conferred, in ordination.

Further we record that there are views concerning the ministry which are intermediate between the types just mentioned. For instance, some who adhere to an episcopal system of church government do not consider that the apostolic succession as described above is a vital element of episcopacy, or they reject it altogether. Others do not regard as essential the historic Episcopate. Those who adhere to presbyteral systems of church government believe that the apostolic ministry is transmissible and has been transmitted through Presbyters orderly associated for the purpose. Those who adhere to the congregational system of government define their ministry as having been and being transmitted according to the precedent and example of the New Testament.

QUESTIONS ON THE SACRAMENTS.

(Report VI, pp. 15–16)

A full consideration of this subject would travel far beyond the limits of the Lausanne discussions, which were confined almost entirely to the Sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion. The questions suggested below are similarly limited, except that in view of its urgent practical importance, a question dealing with Confirmation is included.

(1) Is it true, and if so, in what sense, that 'the Sacraments are of divine appointment'?

(2) On what grounds do some Christians regard the Sacraments as purely symbolic, while others regard them as effective signs? Is it possible to reconcile these two ways of thinking?

(3) Could a reunited Church bring together and include those who adhere exclusively to the baptism of believers and those for whom infant baptism is normal?

(4) In what sense is the benefit of Holy Communion dependent on the faith of the recipient?

(5) What place if any should Confirmation have in a reunited Church?

To the Secretariat,
P. O. Box 226, Boston, Mass., U.S.A.
from

The persons whose names and addresses are listed below might be interested to receive, without charge, printed information about the World Conference on Faith and Order: —

received by the full Conference, *nem. con.*, Lausanne, August 20, 1927.

THE SACRAMENTS.

We are convinced that for the purpose in view in this Conference we should not go into detail in considering Sacraments — by some called "Mysteries." The purpose therefore of this statement is to show that there may be a common approach to and appreciation of Sacraments on the part of those who may otherwise differ in conception and interpretation.

We testify to the fact that the Christian world gives evidence of an increasing sense of the significance and value of Sacraments, and would express our belief that this movement should be fostered and guided as a means of deepening the life and experience of the Churches. In this connection we recognise that the Sacraments have special reference to the corporate life and fellowship of the Church and that the grace is conveyed by the Holy Spirit, taking of the things of Christ and applying them to the soul through Faith.

We agree that Sacraments are of divine appointment and that the Church ought thankfully to observe them as divine gifts.

We hold that in the Sacraments there is an outward sign and an inward grace, and that the Sacraments are means of grace through which God works invisibly in us. We recognise also that in the gifts of His grace God is not limited by His own Sacraments.

The Orthodox Church and others hold that there are seven Sacraments and that for their valid administration there must be a proper form, a proper matter and a proper ministry. Others can regard only Baptism and the Lord's

Supper as Sacraments. Others again, while attaching high value to the sacramental principle, do not make use of the outward signs of Sacraments, but hold that all spiritual benefits are given through immediate contact with God through His Spirit. In this Conference we lay stress on the two Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper, because they are the Sacraments which are generally acknowledged by the members of this Conference.

We believe that in Baptism administered with water in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, for the remission of sins, we are baptised by one Spirit into one body. By this statement it is not meant to ignore the differences in conception, interpretation and mode which exist among us.

We believe that in the Holy Communion our Lord is present, that we have fellowship with God our Father in Jesus Christ His Son, our Living Lord, who is our one Bread, given for the life of the world, sustaining the life of all His people, and that we are in fellowship with all others who are united to Him. We agree that the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper is the Church's most sacred act of worship in which the Lord's atoning death is commemorated and proclaimed, and that it is a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving and an act of solemn self-oblation.

There are among us divergent views, especially as to (1) the mode and manner of the presence of our Lord; (2) the conception of the commemoration and the sacrifice; (3) the relation of the elements to the grace conveyed; and (4) the relation between the minister of this Sacrament and the validity and efficacy of the rite. We are aware that the reality of the divine presence and gift in this Sacrament cannot be adequately apprehended by human thought or expressed in human language.

We close this statement with the prayer that the differences which prevent full communion at the present time may be removed.